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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, April 26, 1943

SUBJECT: "FRUIT FOR THE FAMILY GARDEN." Information from plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

So far this year our Victory Garden conversation has been mostly about vegetables. Today let's concentrate on fruit for the family...fruit you can grow easily and at little cost on the home place. In general, the small fruits are the ones to choose for a family supply...the berries of different kinds and the grapes.

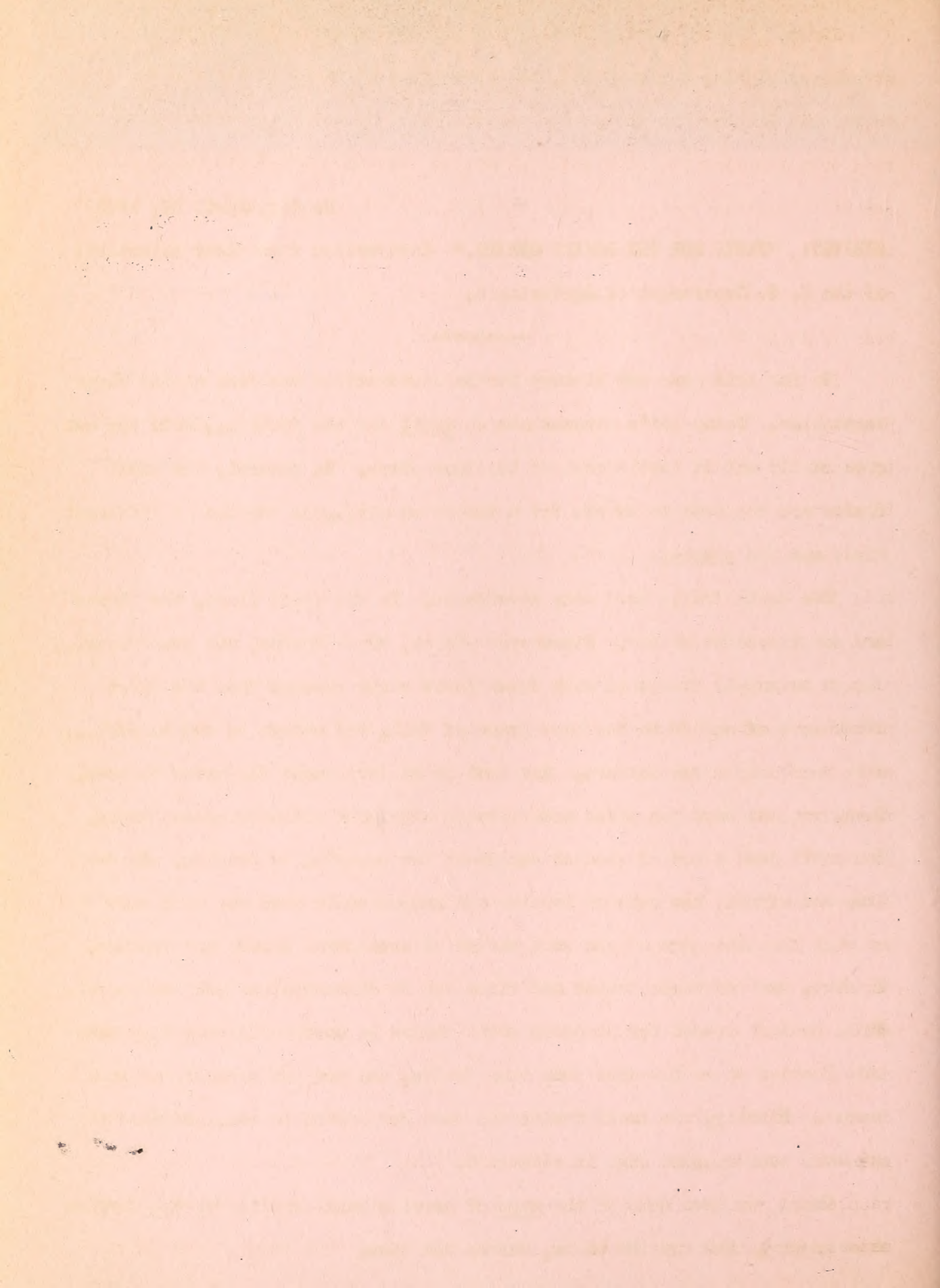
The small fruits have many advantages. In the first place, the plants are not expensive to buy. Strawberry plants, berry bushes, and grapevines... enough to supply the table with fresh fruit right through from the first strawberry of summer to the last grape of fall, and enough to can as well... will cost only a few dollars. And that is an investment for years to come. Then, you can care for these small fruits with your ordinary garden tools. You won't need a lot of special equipment for spraying or pruning. As for time and effort, the care of berries and grapes won't take any more time or work than the care of the same amount of ornamental shrubs and flowers. In fact, many of these bushes and vines can be ornamental as well as useful. Still another reason for planting small fruits in wartime is that they come into bearing so much sooner than tree fruits, and you get a supply of food sooner. Finally, the small fruits are easy for anyone to can...require no pressure canner...are rich in vitamin C.

There you have some of the whys of growing small fruits for the wartime food supply. Now for the whens, wheres and hows.

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First, when to plant. Usually you get best results by setting strawberry plants, berry bushes, and grapevines as early in the spring as you can prepare the soil. The plants should be entirely dormant with no buds even starting at the time of planting. If you plant Everbearing strawberries this spring, you can count on having your first crop of berries this fall. But raspberries, blackberries, dewberries, Youngberries, currants, blueberries, gooseberries and grapes, planted this spring, won't bear fruit until next year or the year after.

If the spring has gotten ahead of you...if berry bushes, strawberry plants, and grapevines are already leafing out in your locality, then plan to plant this fall. You won't get fruit so soon, but it's worth the wait to start your plants under the very best conditions.

Now about where to plant. Small fruits need sunshine, enough air, and soil that is fertile, moist and well-drained. If you haven't a great deal of land to choose from, better count on setting your fruit at the side or rear of your vegetable garden...or setting it where you would put ornamental plants or hedges. Strawberry plants make good ornamentals. Blueberries are often planted as ornamentals and make excellent hedges. Blackberry and raspberry bushes can grow along a fence. Grapes can grow over the fence or make a shady cover for an arbor. Currants and gooseberries can take more shade than other small fruits, so they often do well on the north side of a house. (Of course, you know that you can't grow currants and gooseberries anywhere near white pine trees. The bushes carry a disease that kills white pines.) Here's another point about where to plant: Plant your fruit not only away from the shade and roots of large trees, but away from any dense shrubbery that cuts off circulation of air. Fungus diseases thrive where the air is still and does not circulate. Still another point: Black raspberries sometimes die from a soil disease brought in by potatoes, tomatoes, peppers or eggplant. So don't plant black raspberries near these

vegetables...or in soil where those vegetables have been growing during the last 3 years.

What kind of soil for small fruit? Any soil that will grow good flowers or vegetables ought to grow good berries. Berries do best in soil rich in organic matter--soil that is loose and spongy in texture but holds moisture well, is easy to spade and work. If your soil is hard...bakes and dries out easily, it needs improving before you put in berries. Work in well-rotted stable manure if possible...or compost and commercial fertilizer. Most berries need plenty of moisture, but they don't want poorly drained soil where the water stands after a rain. By the way, blueberries or huckleberries need very acid, rather sandy soil.

Now about how many of the different kinds of small fruits to plant? In full bearing under favorable conditions you can count on one pint of berries for each strawberry plant...a quart and a half to 2 quarts raspberries for each bush...3 to 10 quarts currants or gooseberries for each bush...and 6 to 15 pounds of grapes from each vine. Before you buy, check with your county agent or State college about varieties that will do well where you live. And before you plant, be sure you know how many feet apart to set plants, bushes and vines.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has some free bulletins to help you with your family fruit garden. Write for the leaflet called "The Home Fruit Garden." You will receive the leaflet that give information particularly for your section of the country. This is free from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. as long as the free supply lasts.

